

Critique of Hegel's Philosophy in General

||XI| (6) This is perhaps the place at which, by way of explanation and justification, we might offer some considerations in regard to the Hegelian dialectic generally and especially its exposition in the *Phänomenologie* and *Logik* and also, lastly, the relation (to it) of the modern critical movement.^[42]

So powerful was modern German criticism's preoccupation with the past – so completely was its development entangled with the subject-matter – that here prevailed a completely uncritical attitude to the method of criticising, together with a complete lack of awareness about the *apparently formal*, but really *vital* question: how do we now stand as regards the Hegelian *dialectic*? This lack of awareness about the relationship of modern criticism to the Hegelian philosophy as a whole and especially to the Hegelian dialectic has been so great that critics like *Strauss* and *Bruno Bauer* still remain within the confines of the Hegelian logic; the former completely so and the latter at least implicitly so in his *Synoptiker* (where, in opposition to Strauss, he replaces the substance of “abstract nature” by the “self-consciousness” of abstract man), and even in *Das entdeckte Christenthum*. Thus in *Das entdeckte Christenthum*, for example, you get:

“As though in positing the world, self-consciousness does not posit that which is different [from itself] and in what it is creating it does not create itself, since it in turn annuls the difference between what it has created and itself, since it itself has being only in creating and in the movement – as though its purpose were not this movement?” etc.; or again: “They” (the French materialists) “have not yet been able to see that it is only as the movement of self-consciousness that the movement of the universe has actually come to be for itself, and achieved unity with itself.” [Pp. 113, 114-15.]

Such expressions do not even show any verbal divergence from the Hegelian approach, but on the contrary repeat it word for word.

||XII| How little consciousness there was in relation to the Hegelian dialectic during the act of criticism (Bauer, the *Synoptiker*), and how little this consciousness came into being even after the act of material criticism, is proved by Bauer when, in his *Die gute Sache der Freiheit*, he dismisses the brash question put by Herr Gruppe – “What about logic now?” – by referring him to future critics.^[43]

But even now – now that *Feuerbach* both in his *Thesen* in the *Anekdoten* and, in detail, in the *Philosophie der Zukunft* has in principle overthrown the old dialectic and philosophy; now that that school of criticism, on the other hand, which was incapable of accomplishing this, has all the same seen it accomplished and has proclaimed itself pure, resolute, absolute criticism that has come into the clear with itself; now that this criticism, in its spiritual pride, has reduced the whole process of history to the relation between the rest of the world and itself (the rest of the world, in contrast to itself, falling under the category of “the masses”) and dissolved all dogmatic antitheses into the *single* dogmatic antithesis of its own cleverness and the stupidity of the world – the antithesis of the critical Christ and Mankind, the “*rabble*”; now that daily and hourly it has demonstrated its own excellence against the dullness of the masses; now, finally, that it has proclaimed the critical *Last Judgment* in the shape of an announcement that the day is approaching when the whole of decadent humanity will assemble before it and be sorted by it into groups, each particular mob receiving its *testimonium paupertatis*; now that it has made known in print its superiority to human feelings as well as its superiority to the world, over which it sits enthroned in sublime solitude, only letting fall from time to time from its sarcastic lips the ringing laughter of the Olympian Gods – even now, after all these delightful antics of idealism (i.e., of Young Hegelianism) expiring in the guise of criticism – even now it has not expressed the suspicion that the time was ripe for a critical settling of accounts with the mother of Young Hegelianism – the Hegelian dialectic – and even had nothing to say about its critical attitude towards the Feuerbachian dialectic. This shows a completely uncritical attitude to itself.

Feuerbach is the only one who has a *serious, critical* attitude to the Hegelian dialectic and who has made genuine discoveries in this field. He is in fact the true conqueror of the old philosophy. The extent of his achievement, and the unpretentious simplicity with which he, Feuerbach, gives it to the world, stand in striking contrast to the opposite attitude [of the others].

Feuerbach’s great achievement is:

- (1) The proof that philosophy is nothing else but religion rendered into thought and expounded by thought, i.e., another form and manner of existence of the estrangement of the essence of man; hence equally to be condemned;
- (2) The establishment of *true materialism* and of *real science*, by making the social relationship of “man to man” the basic principle of the theory;
- (3) His opposing to the negation of the negation, which claims to be the absolute positive, the self-supporting positive, positively based on itself.

Feuerbach explains the Hegelian dialectic (and thereby justifies starting out from the positive facts which we know by the senses) as follows:

Hegel sets out from the estrangement of substance (in logic, from the infinite, abstractly universal) – from the absolute and fixed abstraction; which means, put popularly, that he sets out from religion and theology.

Secondly, he annuls the infinite, and posits the actual, sensuous, real, finite, particular (philosophy, annulment of religion and theology).

Thirdly, he again annuls the positive and restores the abstraction, the infinite – restoration of religion and theology.

Feuerbach thus conceives the negation of the negation *only* as a contradiction of philosophy with itself – as the philosophy which affirms theology (the transcendent, etc.) after having denied it, and which it therefore affirms in opposition to itself.

The positive position or self-affirmation and self-confirmation contained in the negation of the negation is taken to be a position which is not yet sure of itself, which is therefore burdened with its opposite, which is doubtful of itself and therefore in need of proof, and which, therefore, is not a position demonstrating itself by its existence – not an acknowledged ||XIII|| position; hence it is directly and immediately confronted by the position of sense-certainty based on itself. [Feuerbach also defines the negation of the negation, the definite concept, as thinking surpassing itself in thinking and as thinking wanting to be directly awareness, nature, reality. – *Note by Marx*^[44]]

But because Hegel has conceived the negation of the negation, from the point of view of the positive relation inherent in it, as the true and only positive, and from the point of view of the negative relation inherent in it as the only true act and spontaneous activity of all being, he has only found the *abstract, logical, speculative* expression for the movement of history, which is not yet the *real* history of man as a given subject, but only the *act of creation*, the *history of the origin* of man.

We shall explain both the abstract form of this process and the difference between this process as it is in Hegel in contrast to modern criticism, in contrast to the same process in Feuerbach's *Wesen des Christenthums*, or rather the *critical* form of this in Hegel still uncritical process.

Let us take a look at the Hegelian system. One must begin with Hegel's *Phänomenologie*, the true point of origin and the secret of the Hegelian philosophy.

Phenomenology.

A. Self-consciousness.

I. *Consciousness*. (a) Certainty at the level of sense-experience; or the “this” and *meaning*. (b) *Perception*, or the thing with its properties, and *deception*. (g) Force and understanding, appearance and the supersensible world.

II. *Self-consciousness*. The truth of certainty of self. (a) Independence and dependence of self-consciousness; mastery and servitude. (b) Freedom of self-consciousness. Stoicism, scepticism, the unhappy consciousness.

III. *Reason*. Reason’s certainty and reason’s truth. (a) Observation as a process of reason. Observation of nature and of self-consciousness. (b) Realisation of rational self-consciousness through its own activity. Pleasure and necessity. The law of the heart and the insanity of self-conceit. Virtue and the course of the world. (c) The individuality which is real in and for itself. The spiritual animal kingdom and the deception or the real fact. Reason as lawgiver. Reason which tests laws.

B. Mind.

I. *True mind*, ethics. II. Mind in self-estrangement, culture. III. Mind certain of itself, morality.

C. **Religion**. *Natural religion; religion of art; revealed religion*.

D. Absolute knowledge.

Hegel’s *Encyklopädie*, beginning as it does with logic, with *pure speculative thought*, and ending with *absolute knowledge* – with the self-conscious, self-comprehending philosophic or absolute (i.e., superhuman) abstract mind – is in its entirety nothing but the *display*, the self-objectification, of the *essence* of the philosophic mind, and the philosophic mind is nothing but the estranged mind of the world thinking within its self-estrangement – i.e., comprehending itself abstractly.

Logic – mind’s *coin of the realm*, the speculative or *mental value* of man and nature – its essence which has grown totally indifferent to all real determinateness, and hence unreal – is *alienated thinking*, and therefore thinking which abstracts from nature and from real man: *abstract thinking*.

Then: *The externality of this abstract thinking ... nature*, as it is for this abstract thinking. Nature is external to it – its self-loss; and it apprehends nature also in an external fashion, as abstract thought, but as alienated abstract thinking.

Finally, *mind*, this thinking returning home to its own point of origin – the thinking which as the anthropological, phenomenological, psychological, ethical, artistic and religious mind is not valid for itself, until ultimately it finds itself, and affirms itself, as *absolute* knowledge and hence absolute, i.e., abstract, mind, thus receiving its conscious embodiment in the mode of existence corresponding to it. For its real mode of existence is *abstraction*.

There is a double error in Hegel.

The **first** emerges most clearly in the *Phänomenologie*, the birth-place of the Hegelian philosophy. When, for instance, wealth, state-power, etc., are understood by Hegel as entities estranged from the *human* being, this only happens in their form as thoughts ... They are thought-entities, and therefore merely an estrangement of *pure*, i.e., abstract, philosophical thinking. The whole process therefore ends with absolute knowledge. It is precisely abstract thought from which these objects are estranged and which they confront with their presumption of reality. The *philosopher* – who is himself an abstract form of estranged man – takes himself as the *criterion* of the estranged world. The whole *history of the alienation process* [*Entäußerungsgeschichte*] and the whole *process of the retraction* of the alienation is therefore nothing but the *history of the production* of abstract (i.e., absolute)

| |XVII|^[45] thought – of logical, speculative thought. The *estrangement*, [*Entfremdung*] which therefore forms the real interest of the transcendence [*Aufhebung*] of this alienation [*Entäußerung*], is the opposition of *in itself* and *for itself*, of *consciousness and self-consciousness*, of *object and subject* – that is to say, it is the opposition between abstract thinking and sensuous reality or real sensuousness within thought itself. All other oppositions and movements of these oppositions are but the *semblance*, the *cloak*, the *exoteric* shape of these oppositions which alone matter, and which constitute the *meaning* of these other, profane oppositions. It is not the fact that the human being *objectifies himself inhumanly*, in opposition to himself, but the fact that he *objectifies himself* [*selbst sich vergegenständlicht*] in *distinction* from and in *opposition* to abstract thinking, that constitutes the posited essence of the estrangement [*Entfremdung*] and the thing to be superseded [*aufzuhebende*].

| |XVIII| The appropriation of man's essential powers, which have become objects – indeed, alien objects – is thus in the *first place* only an *appropriation* occurring in *consciousness*, in *pure thought*, i.e., in *abstraction*: it is the appropriation of these

objects as *thoughts* and as *movements of thought*. Consequently, despite its thoroughly negative and critical appearance and despite the genuine criticism contained in it, which often anticipates far later development, there is already latent in the *Phänomenologie* as a germ, a potentiality, a secret, the uncritical positivism and the equally uncritical idealism of Hegel's later works – that philosophic dissolution and restoration of the existing empirical world.

In the second place: the vindication of the objective world for man – for example, the realisation that *sensuous* consciousness is not an *abstractly* sensuous consciousness but a *humanly* sensuous consciousness, that religion, wealth, etc., are but the estranged world of *human* objectification, of *man's* essential powers put to work and that they are therefore but the *path* to the true *human* world – this appropriation or the insight into this process appears in Hegel therefore in this form, that *sense, religion, state power, etc.*, are *spiritual* entities; for only *mind* is the *true* essence of man, and the true form of mind is thinking mind, theological, speculative mind.

The *human character* of nature and of the nature created by history – man's products – appears in the form that they are *products* of abstract mind and as such, therefore, phases of *mind – thought-entities*. The *Phänomenologie* is, therefore, a hidden, mystifying and still uncertain criticism; but inasmuch as it depicts man's *estrangement*, even though man appears only as mind, there lie concealed in it *all* the elements of criticism, already *prepared* and *elaborated* in a manner often rising far above the Hegelian standpoint. The “unhappy consciousness”, the “honest consciousness”, the struggle of the “noble and base consciousness”, etc., etc. – these separate sections contain, but still in an estranged form, the *critical* elements of whole spheres such as religion, the state, civil life, etc. Just as *entities, objects*, appear as thought-entities, so the *subject* is always *consciousness* or *self-consciousness*; or rather the object appears only as *abstract* consciousness, man only as *self-consciousness*: the distinct forms of estrangement which make their appearance are, therefore, only various forms of consciousness and self-consciousness. Just as *in itself* abstract consciousness (the form in which the object is conceived) is merely a moment of distinction of self-consciousness, what appears as the result of the movement is the identity of self-consciousness with consciousness – absolute knowledge – the movement of abstract thought no longer directed outwards but proceeding now only within its own self: that is to say, the dialectic of pure thought is the result. |XVIII|

||XXIII|^[46] The outstanding achievement of Hegel's *Phänomenologie* and of its final outcome, the dialectic of negativity as the moving and generating principle, is thus first that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process, conceives objectification as loss of the object, as alienation and as transcendence of this

alienation; that he thus grasps the essence of *labour* and comprehends objective man – true, because real man – as the outcome of man's *own labour*. The *real, active* orientation of man to himself as a species-being, or his manifestation as a real species-being (i.e., as a human being), is only possible if he really brings out all his *species-powers* – something which in turn is only possible through the cooperative action of all of mankind, only as the result of history – and treats these powers as objects: and this, to begin with, is again only possible in the form of estrangement.

We shall now demonstrate in detail Hegel's one-sidedness and limitations as they are displayed in the final chapter of the *Phänomenologie*, "Absolute Knowledge" – a chapter which contains the condensed spirit of the *Phänomenologie*, the relationship of the *Phänomenologie* to speculative dialectic, and also Hegel's *consciousness* concerning both and their relationship to one another.

Let us provisionally say just this much in advance: Hegel's standpoint is that of modern political economy.^[47] He grasps *labour* as the *essence* of man – as man's essence which stands the test: he sees only the positive, not the negative side of labour. Labour is *man's coming-to-be for himself* within *alienation*, or as *alienated* man. The only labour which Hegel knows and recognises is *abstractly mental* labour. Therefore, that which constitutes the *essence* of philosophy – the *alienation of man who knows himself*, or *alienated science thinking itself* - Hegel grasps as its essence; and in contradistinction to previous philosophy he is therefore able to combine its separate aspects, and to present his philosophy as *the* philosophy. What the other philosophers did – that they grasped separate phases of nature and of abstract self-consciousness, namely, of human life as phases of self-consciousness – is *known* to Hegel as the *doings* of philosophy. Hence his science is absolute.

Let us now turn to our subject.

"Absolute Knowledge". The last chapter of the "Phänomenologie".

The main point is that the *object of consciousness* is nothing else but *self-consciousness*, or that the object is only *objectified self-consciousness* – self-consciousness as object. (Positing of man = self-consciousness).

The issue, therefore, is to surmount the *object of consciousness*. *Objectivity* as such is regarded as an *estranged* human relationship which does not correspond to the *essence of man*, to self-consciousness. The *reappropriation* of the objective essence of man, produced within the orbit of estrangement as something alien,

therefore denotes not only the annulment of *estrangement*, but of *objectivity* as well. Man, that is to say, is regarded as a *non-objective, spiritual* being. The movement of *surmounting the object of consciousness* is now described by Hegel in the following way:

The *object* reveals itself not merely as *returning* into the *self* – this is according to Hegel the *one-sided* way of apprehending this movement, the grasping of only one side. Man is equated with self. The self, however, is only the *abstractly* conceived man – man created by abstraction. Man *is* selfish. His eye, his ear, etc., are *selfish*. In him every one of his essential powers has the quality of *selfhood*. But it is quite false to say on that account “*self-consciousness* has eyes, ears, essential powers”. *Self-consciousness* is rather a quality of human nature, of the human eye, etc.; it is not human nature that is a quality of

||XXIV|*self-consciousness*.

The self-abstracted entity, fixed for itself, is man as *abstract egoist* – *egoism* raised in its pure abstraction to the level of thought. (We shall return to this point later.)

For Hegel the *human being* – *man* – equals *self-consciousness*. All estrangement of the human being is therefore *nothing* but *estrangement of self-consciousness*. The estrangement of self-consciousness is not regarded as an *expression* – reflected in the realm of knowledge and thought – of the *realestrangement* of the human being. Instead, the *actual* estrangement – that which appears real – is according to its *innermost*, hidden nature (which is only brought to light by philosophy) nothing but the *manifestation* of the estrangement of the real human essence, of *self-consciousness*. The science which comprehends this is therefore called *phenomenology*. All reappropriation of the estranged objective essence appears therefore, as incorporation into self-consciousness: The man who takes hold of his essential being is *merely* the self-consciousness which takes hold of objective essences. Return of the object into the self is therefore the reappropriation of the object.

Expressed in *all its aspects*, the *surmounting of the object of consciousness* means:

- (1) That the object as such presents itself to consciousness as something vanishing.
- (2) That it is the alienation of self-consciousness which posits thinghood.^[48]
- (3) That this alienation has, not merely a *negative* but a *positive* significance
- (4) That it has this meaning not merely *for us* or intrinsically, but *for self-consciousness itself*.
- (5) *For self-consciousness*, the negative of the object, or its annulling of itself, has *positive* significance – or it *knows* this futility of the object – because of the fact

that it alienates itself, for in this alienation it posits *itself* as object, or, for the sake of the indivisible unity of *being-for-self*, posits the object as itself.

(6) On the other hand, this contains likewise the other moment, that self-consciousness has also just as much superseded this alienation and objectivity and resumed them into itself, being thus *at home* in *its* other-being *as such*.

(7) This is the movement of consciousness and this is therefore the totality of its moments.

(8) Consciousness must similarly be related to the object in the totality of its determinations and have comprehended it in terms of each of them. This totality of its determinations makes the object *intrinsically a spiritual being*; and it becomes so in truth for consciousness through the apprehending of each one of the determinations as *self*, or through what was called above the *spiritual* attitude to them. [\[49\]](#)

As to (1): That the object as such presents itself to consciousness as something vanishing – this is the above-mentioned *return of the object into the self*.

As to (2): The *alienation of self-consciousness* posits *thinghood*. Because man equals self-consciousness, his alienated, objective essence, or *thinghood*, equals *alienated self-consciousness*, and *thinghood* is thus posited through this alienation (thinghood being *that* which is an *object for man* and an object for him is really only that which is to him an essential object, therefore his *objective* essence. And since it is not *real man*, nor therefore *nature* – man being *human nature* – who as such is made the subject, but only the abstraction of man – self-consciousness – thinghood cannot be anything but alienated self-consciousness). It is only to be expected that a living, natural being equipped and endowed with objective (i.e., material) essential powers should have real natural objects of his essence; and that his self-alienation should lead to the positing of a *real*, objective world, but within the framework of *externality*, and, therefore, an overwhelming world not belonging to his own essential being. There is nothing incomprehensible or mysterious in this. It would be mysterious, rather, if it were otherwise. But it is equally clear that a *self-consciousness* by its alienation can posit only *thinghood*, i.e., only an abstract thing, a thing of abstraction and not a *real* thing. It is ||XXVI| [\[50\]](#) clear, further, that thinghood is therefore utterly without any *independence*, any *essentiality* vis-à-vis self-consciousness; that on the contrary it is a mere creature – something *posited* by self-consciousness. And what is posited, instead of confirming itself, is but confirmation of the act of positing which for a moment fixes its energy as the product, and gives it the *semblance* – but only for a moment – of an independent, real substance.

|| Whenever real, corporeal *man*, man with his feet firmly on the solid ground, man exhaling and inhaling all the forces of nature, *posits* his real, objective *essential*

powers as alien objects by his externalisation, it is not the *act of positing* which is the subject in this process: it is the subjectivity of *objective* essential powers, whose action, therefore, must also be something objective. An objective being acts objectively, and he would not act objectively if the objective did not reside in the very nature of his being. He only creates or posits objects, because he is posited by objects – because at bottom he is *nature*. In the act of positing, therefore, this objective being does not fall from his state of “pure activity” into *a creating of the object*; on the contrary, his *objective* product only confirms his *objective* activity, his activity as the activity of an objective, natural being.

Here we see how consistent naturalism or humanism is distinct from both idealism and materialism, and constitutes at the same time the unifying truth of both. We see also how only naturalism is capable of comprehending the action of world history.

<Man is directly a *natural being*. As a natural being and as a living natural being he is on the one hand endowed with *natural powers, vital powers* – he is an *active* natural being. These forces exist in him as tendencies and abilities – as *instincts*. On the other hand, as a natural, corporeal, sensuous objective being he is a *suffering*, conditioned and limited creature, like animals and plants. That is to say, the *objects* of his instincts exist outside him, as *objects* independent of him; yet these objects are *objects* that he *needs* – essential *objects*, indispensable to the manifestation and confirmation of his essential powers. To say that man is a *corporeal*, living, real, sensuous, objective being full of natural vigour is to say that he has *real, sensuous objects* as the object of his being or of his life, or that he can only *express* his life in real, sensuous objects. *To be* objective, natural and sensuous, and at the same time to have object, nature and sense outside oneself, or oneself to be object, nature and sense for a third party, is one and the same thing.>

Hunger is a natural *need*; it therefore needs a *nature* outside itself, an *object* outside itself, in order to satisfy itself, to be stilled. Hunger is an acknowledged need of my body for an *object* existing outside it, indispensable to its integration and to the expression of its essential being. The sun is the *object* of the plant – an indispensable object to it, confirming its life – just as the plant is an object of the sun, being an *expression* of the life-awakening power of the sun, of the sun’s *objective* essential power.

A being which does not have its nature outside itself is not a *natural* being, and plays no part in the system of nature. A being which has no object outside itself is not an objective being. A being which is not itself an object for some third being has no being for its *object*; i.e., it is not objectively related. Its being is not objective.

| |XXVII| A non-objective being is a *non-being*.

Suppose a being which is neither an object itself, nor has an object. Such a being, in the first place, would be the *unique* being: there would exist no being outside it – it would exist solitary and alone. For as soon as there are objects outside me, as soon as I am not *alone*, I am *another* – *another reality* than the object outside me. For this third object I am thus a *different reality* than itself; that is, I am *its* object. Thus, to suppose a being which is not the object of another being is to presuppose that *no* objective being exists. As soon as I have an object, this object has me for an object. But a *non-objective* being is an unreal, non-sensuous thing – a product of mere thought (i.e., of mere imagination) – an abstraction. To be *sensuous*, that is, to be really existing, means to be an object of sense, to be a *sensuous* object, to have sensuous objects outside oneself – objects of one's sensuousness. To be sensuous is to *suffer*.

Man as an objective, sensuous being is therefore a *suffering* being – and because he feels that he suffers, a *passionate* being. Passion is the essential power of man energetically bent on its object.

<But man is not merely a natural being: he is a *human* natural being. That is to say, he is a being for himself. Therefore he is a *species-being*, and has to confirm and manifest himself as such both in his being and in his knowing. Therefore, *human* objects are not natural objects as they immediately present themselves, and neither is *human sense* as it immediately *is* – as it is objectively – *human* sensibility, human objectivity. Neither nature objectively nor nature subjectively is directly given in a form adequate to the *human* being.> And as everything natural has to *come into being*, *man* too has his act of origin – *history* – which, however, is for him a known history, and hence as an act of origin it is a conscious self-transcending act of origin. History is the true natural history of man (on which more later).

Thirdly, because this positing of thinghood is itself only an illusion, an act contradicting the nature of pure activity, it has to be cancelled again and thinghood denied.

Re 3, 4, 5 and 6. (3) This externalisation [*Entäußerung*] of consciousness has not merely a *negative* but a *positive* significance, and (4) it has this meaning not merely *for us* or intrinsically, but for consciousness itself. *For consciousness* the negative of the object, its annulling of itself, has *positive* significance – i.e., consciousness *knows* this nullity of the object – because it alienates *itself*; for, in this alienation it *knows* itself as object, or, for the sake of the indivisible unity of *being-for-itself*, the object as itself. (6) On the other hand, there is also this other

moment in the process, that consciousness has also just as much superseded this alienation and objectivity and resumed them into itself, being thus *at home* in its *other-being as such*.

As we have already seen, the appropriation of what is estranged and objective, or the annulling of objectivity in the form of *estrangement* (which has to advance from indifferent strangeness to real, antagonistic estrangement), means likewise or even primarily for Hegel that it is *objectivity* which is to be annulled, because it is not the *determinate* character of the object, but rather its *objective* character that is offensive and constitutes estrangement for self-consciousness. The object is therefore something negative, self-annulling – a *nullity*. This nullity of the object has not only a negative but a *positive* meaning for consciousness, since this nullity of the object is precisely the *self-confirmation* of the non-objectivity, of the

| |XXVIII| *abstraction* of itself. For *consciousness itself* the nullity of the object has a positive meaning because it *knows* this nullity, the objective being, as *its self-alienation*; because it knows that it exists only as a result of its own self-alienation....

The way in which consciousness is, and in which something is for it, is *knowing*. Knowing is its sole act. Something therefore comes to be for consciousness insofar as the latter *knows* this *something*. Knowing is its sole objective relation.

It, consciousness, then, knows the nullity of the object (i.e., knows the non-existence of the distinction between the object and itself, the non-existence of the object for it) because it knows the object as its *self-alienation*; that is, it knows itself – knows knowing as object – because the object is only the *semblance* of an object, a piece of mystification, which in its essence, however, is nothing else but knowing itself, which has confronted itself with itself and hence has confronted itself with a *nullity* – a something which has *no* objectivity outside the knowing. Or: knowing knows that in relating itself to an object it is only *outside* itself – that it only externalises itself; that *it itself* only *appears* to itself as an object – or that that which appears to it as an object is only itself.

On the other hand, says Hegel, there is here at the same time this other moment, that consciousness has just as much annulled and reabsorbed this externalisation and objectivity, being thus *at home* in its *other-being as such*.

In this discussion all the illusions of speculation are brought together.

First of all: consciousness, self-consciousness, is at home in its other-being as such. It is therefore – or if we here abstract from the Hegelian abstraction and put the self-consciousness of man instead of self-consciousness – it is *at home* in its *other being as such*. This implies, for one thing, that consciousness (knowing as knowing, thinking as thinking) pretends to be directly the *other* of itself – to be the world of sense, the real world, life – thought surpassing itself in thought (Feuerbach).^[51] This aspect is contained herein, inasmuch as consciousness as mere consciousness takes offence not at estranged objectivity, but at *objectivity as such*.

Secondly, this implies that self-conscious man, insofar as he has recognised and superseded the spiritual world (or his world's spiritual, general mode of being) as self-alienation, nevertheless again confirms it in this alienated shape and passes it off as his true mode of being – re-establishes it, and pretends to *beat home in his other-being as such*. Thus, for instance, after superseding religion, after recognising religion to be a product of self-alienation he yet finds confirmation of himself in *religion as religion*. Here is the root of Hegel's *false* positivism, or of his merely *apparent* criticism: this is what Feuerbach designated as the positing, negating and re-establishing of religion or theology – but it has to be expressed in more general terms. Thus reason is at home in unreason as unreason. The man who has recognised that he is leading an alienated life in law, politics, etc., is leading his true human life in this alienated life as such. Self-affirmation, self-confirmation *in contradiction* with itself – in contradiction both with the knowledge of and with the essential being of the object – is thus true *knowledge and life*.

There can therefore no longer be any question about an act of accommodation on Hegel's part *vis-à-vis* religion, the state, etc., since this lie is the lie of his principle.

| |XXIX| If I *know* religion as *alienated* human self-consciousness, then what I know in it as religion is not my self-consciousness, but my alienated self-consciousness confirmed in it. I therefore know my self-consciousness that belongs to itself, to its very nature, confirmed not in *religion* but rather *inannihilated* and *superseded* religion.

In Hegel, therefore, the negation of the negation is not the confirmation of the true essence, effected precisely through negation of the pseudo-essence. With him the negation of the negation is the confirmation of the pseudo-essence, or of the self-estranged essence in its denial; or it is the denial of this pseudo-essence as an objective being dwelling outside man and independent of him, and its transformation into the subject.

A peculiar role, therefore, is played by the act of *superseding* in which denial and preservation, i.e., affirmation, are bound together.

Thus, for example, in Hegel's philosophy of law, *civil law* superseded equals *morality*, morality superseded equals the *family*, the family superseded equals *civil society*, civil society superseded equals the *state*, the state superseded equals *world history*. In the *actual world* civil law, morality, the family, civil society, the state, etc., remain in existence, only they have become *moments* – states of the existence and being of man – which have no validity in isolation, but dissolve and engender one another, etc. They have become *moments of motion*.

In their actual existence this *mobile* nature of theirs is hidden. It appears and is made manifest only in thought, in philosophy. Hence my true religious existence is my existence in the *philosophy of religion*; my true political existence is my existence in the *philosophy of law*; my true natural existence, existence in the *philosophy of nature*; my true artistic existence, existence in the *philosophy of art*; my true *human* existence, my *existence in philosophy*. Likewise the true existence of religion, the state, nature, art, is the *philosophy* of religion, of nature, of the state and of art. If, however, the philosophy of religion, etc., is for me the sole true existence of religion then, too, it is only as a *philosopher of religion* that I am truly religious, and so I deny *real* religious sentiment and the really *religious* man. But at the same time I *assert* them, in part within my own existence or within the alien existence which I oppose to them – for this is only their *philosophic* expression – and in part I assert them in their distinct original shape, since for me they represent merely the *apparent* other-being, allegories, forms of their own true existence (i.e., of my *philosophical* existence) hidden under sensuous disguises.

In just the same way, *quality* superseded equals *quantity*, quantity superseded equals *measure*, measure superseded equals *essence*, essence superseded equals *appearance*, appearance superseded equals *actuality*, actuality superseded equals the *concept*, the concept superseded equals *objectivity*, objectivity superseded equals the *absolute idea*, the absolute idea superseded equals *nature*, nature superseded equals *subjective* mind, subjective mind superseded equals *ethical* objective mind, ethical mind superseded equals *art*, art superseded equals *religion*, religion superseded equals *absolute knowledge*.^[52]

On the one hand, this act of superseding is a transcending of a conceptual entity; thus, private property *as a concept* is transcended in the *concept* of morality. And because thought imagines itself to be directly the other of itself, to be *sensuous reality* – and therefore takes its own action for *sensuous, real* action – this superseding in thought, which leaves its object in existence in the real world, believes that it has really overcome it. On the other hand, because the object has

now become for it a moment of thought, thought takes it in its reality too to be self-confirmation of itself – of self-consciousness, of abstraction.

| |XXX| From the one point of view the entity which Hegel *supersedes* in philosophy is therefore not *real* religion, the *real* state, or *real* nature, but religion itself already as an object of knowledge, i.e., *dogmatics*; the same with *jurisprudence*, *political science* and *natural science*. From the one point of view, therefore, he stands in opposition both to the *real* thing and to immediate, unphilosophic *science* or the unphilosophic *conceptions* of this thing. He therefore contradicts their conventional conceptions. [The conventional conception of theology, jurisprudence, political science, natural science, etc. - Ed.]

On the other hand, the religious, etc., man can find in Hegel his final confirmation.

It is now time to formulate the *positive* aspects of the Hegelian dialectic within the realm of estrangement.

(a) *Supersession* as an objective movement of *retracting* the alienation *into self*. This is the insight, expressed within the estrangement, concerning the *appropriation* of the objective essence through the supersession of its estrangement; it is the estranged insight into the *real objectification* of man, into the real appropriation of his objective essence through the annihilation of the *estranged* character of the objective world, through the supersession of the objective world in its estranged mode of being. In the same way atheism, being the supersession of God, is the advent of theoretic humanism, and communism, as the supersession of private property, is the vindication of real human life as man's possession and thus the advent of practical humanism, or atheism is humanism mediated with itself through the supersession of religion, whilst communism is humanism mediated with itself through the supersession of private property. Only through the supersession of this mediation – which is itself, however, a necessary premise – does positively self-deriving humanism, *positive* humanism, come into being.

But atheism and communism are no flight, no abstraction, no loss of the objective world created by man – of man's essential powers born to the realm of objectivity; they are not a returning in poverty to unnatural, primitive simplicity. On the contrary, they are but the first real emergence, the actual realisation for man of man's essence and of his essence as something real.

Thus, by grasping the *positive* meaning of self-referred negation (although again in estranged fashion) Hegel grasps man's self-estrangement, the alienation of man's essence, man's loss of objectivity and his loss of realness as self-discovery, manifestation of his nature, objectification and realisation. <In short, within the

sphere of abstraction, Hegel conceives labour as man's act of *self-genesis* – conceives man's relation to himself as an alien being and the manifestation of himself as an alien being to be the emergence of *species-consciousness* and *species-life*.>

(b) However, apart from, or rather in consequence of, the referral already described, this act appears in Hegel:

First as a *merely formal*, because abstract, act, because the human being itself is taken to be only an *abstract, thinking being*, conceived merely as self-consciousness. And,

Secondly, because the exposition is *formal* and *abstract*, the supersession of the alienation becomes a confirmation of the alienation; or for Hegel this movement of *self-genesis* and *self-objectification* in the form of *self-alienation* and *self-estrangement* is the *absolute*, and hence final, *expression of human life* – of life with itself as its aim, of life at peace with itself, and in unity with its essence.

This movement, in its abstract | |XXXI| form as dialectic, is therefore regarded as *truly human life*, and because it is nevertheless an abstraction – an estrangement of human life – it is regarded as a *divine process*, but as the divine process of man, a process traversed by man's abstract, pure, absolute essence that is distinct from himself.

Thirdly, this process must have a bearer, a subject. But the subject only comes into being as a result. This result – the subject knowing itself as absolute self-consciousness – is therefore *God, absolute Spirit, the self-knowing and self-manifesting idea*. Real man and real nature become mere predicates – symbols of this hidden, unreal man and of this unreal nature. Subject and predicate are therefore related to each other in absolute reversal – a *mystical subject-object* or a *subjectivity reaching beyond the object* – the *absolute subject as a process*, as *subject alienating* itself and returning from alienation into itself, but at the same time retracting this alienation into itself, and the subject as this process; a pure, *incessant* revolving within itself.

First. Formal and abstract conception of man's act of self-creation or self-objectification.

Hegel having posited man as equivalent to self-consciousness, the estranged object – the estranged essential reality of man – is nothing but *consciousness*, the thought of estrangement merely – estrangement's *abstract* and therefore empty and unreal expression, *negation*. The supersession of the alienation is therefore likewise

nothing but an abstract, empty supersession of that empty abstraction – the *negation of the negation*. The rich, living, sensuous, concrete activity of self-objectification is therefore reduced to its mere abstraction, *absolute negativity* – an abstraction which is again fixed as such and considered as an independent activity – as sheer activity. Because this so-called negativity is nothing but the *abstract, empty* form of that real living act, its content can in consequence be merely a *formal* content produced by abstraction from all content. As a result therefore one gets general, abstract *forms of abstraction* pertaining to every content and on that account indifferent to, and, consequently, valid for, all content – the thought-forms or logical categories torn from *real* mind and from *real* nature. (We shall unfold the *logical* content of absolute negativity further on.)

| Hegel's positive achievement here, in his speculative logic, is that the *definite concepts*, the universal *fixed thought-forms* in their independence *vis-à-vis* nature and mind are a necessary result of the general estrangement of the human being and therefore also of a human thought, and that Hegel has therefore brought these together and presented them as moments of the abstraction-process. For example, superseded being is essence, superseded essence is concept, the concept superseded is ... absolute idea. But what, then, is the absolute idea? It supersedes its own self again, if it does not want to traverse once more from the beginning the whole act of abstraction, and to satisfy itself with being a totality of abstractions or the self-comprehending abstraction. But abstraction comprehending itself as abstraction knows itself to be nothing: it must abandon itself – abandon abstraction – and so it arrives at an entity which is its exact opposite – at *nature*. Thus, the entire logic is the demonstration that abstract thought is nothing in itself; that the absolute idea is nothing for itself; that only *nature* is something.

||XXXII| The absolute idea, the abstract idea, which

“considered with regard to its unity with itself is intuiting ([Logic § 244](#)), and which (*loc. cit.*) “in its own absolute truth *resolves* to let the moment of its particularity or of initial characterisation and other-being, the *immediate idea*, as its reflection, *go forth freely from itself as nature*” (*loc. cit.*),

this whole idea which behaves in such a strange and bizarre way, and which has given the Hegelians such terrible headaches, is from beginning to end nothing else but *abstraction* (i.e., the abstract thinker), which, made wise by experience and enlightened concerning its truth, resolves under various (false and themselves still abstract) conditions to *abandon itself* and to replace its self-absorption, nothingness, generality and indeterminateness by its other-being, the particular, and the determinate; resolves to let *nature*, which it held hidden in itself only as an abstraction, as a thought-entity, *go forth freely from itself*; that is to say, this idea resolves to forsake abstraction and to have a look at nature *free* of abstraction. The

abstract idea, which without mediation becomes *intuiting*, is indeed nothing else but abstract thinking that gives itself up and resolves on *intuition*. This entire transition from logic to natural philosophy is nothing else but the transition – so difficult to effect for the abstract thinker, who therefore describes it in such an adventurous way – from *abstracting* to *intuiting*. The *mystical* feeling which drives the philosopher forward from abstract thinking to intuiting is *boredom* – the longing for content.

(The man estranged from himself is also the thinker estranged from his *essence* – that is, from the natural and human essence. His thoughts are therefore fixed mental forms dwelling outside nature and man. Hegel has locked up all these fixed mental forms together in his logic, interpreting each of them first as negation – that is, as an *alienation* of *human* thought – and then as negation of the negation – that is, as a superseding of this alienation, as a *real* expression of human thought. But as this still takes place within the confines of the estrangement, this negation of the negation is in part the restoring of these fixed forms in their estrangement; in part a stopping at the last act – the act of self-reference in alienation – as the true mode of being of these fixed mental forms; * –

[* (This means that what Hegel does is to put in place of these fixed abstractions the act of abstraction which revolves in its own circle. We must therefore give him the credit for having indicated the source of all these inappropriate concepts which originally appertained to particular philosophers; for having brought them together; and for having created the entire compass of abstraction as the object of criticism, instead of some specific abstraction.) (Why Hegel separates thought from the *subject* we shall see later; at this stage it is already clear, however, that when man is not, his characteristic expression cannot be human either, and so neither could thought be grasped as an expression of man as a human and natural subject endowed with eyes, ears, etc., and living in society, in the world, and in nature.) – Note by Marx]

– and in part, to the extent that this abstraction apprehends itself and experiences an infinite weariness with itself, there makes its appearance in Hegel, in the form of the resolution to recognise *nature* as the essential being and to go over to intuition, the abandonment of abstract thought – the abandonment of thought revolving solely within the orbit of thought, of thought *sans* eyes, *sans* teeth, *sans* ears, *sans* everything.)

||XXXIII| But *nature* too, taken abstractly, for itself – nature fixed in isolation from man – is *nothing* for man. It goes without saying that the abstract thinker who has committed himself to intuiting, intuiting nature abstractly. Just as nature lay enclosed in the thinker in the form of the absolute idea, in the form of a thought-entity – in a

shape which was obscure and enigmatic even to him – so by letting it emerge from himself he has really let emerge only this *abstract nature*, only nature as a *thought-entity* – but now with the significance that it is the other-being of thought, that it is real, intuited nature – nature distinguished from abstract thought. Or, to talk in human language, the abstract thinker learns in his intuition of nature that the entities which he thought to create from nothing, from pure abstraction – the entities he believed he was producing in the divine dialectic as pure products of the labour of thought, for ever shuttling back and forth in itself and never looking outward into reality – are nothing else but *abstractions* from *characteristics of nature*. To him, therefore, the whole of nature merely repeats the logical abstractions in a sensuous, external form. He once more *resolves* nature into these abstractions. Thus, his intuition of nature is only the act of confirming his abstraction from the intuition of nature [Let us consider for a moment Hegel's characteristics of nature and the transition from nature to the mind. Nature has resulted as the idea in the form of the other-being. Since the id ...] – is only the conscious repetition by him of the process of creating his abstraction. Thus, for example, time equals negativity referred to itself (Hegel, *Encyclopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse*. p. 238). To the superseded becoming as being there corresponds, in natural form, superseded movement as matter. Light is *reflection-in-itself*, the *natural* form. Body as *moon* and *comet* is the *natural* form of the *antithesis* which according to logic is on the one side the *positive resting on itself* and on the other side the *negative* resting on itself. The earth is the *natural* form of the logical *ground*, as the negative unity of the antithesis, etc.

Nature as nature – that is to say, insofar as it is still sensuously distinguished from that secret sense hidden within it – nature isolated, distinguished from these abstractions is *nothing* – a *nothing proving itself to be nothing* – is *devoid of sense*, or has only the sense of being an externality which has to be annulled.

“In the finite-*teleological* position is to be found the correct premise that nature does not contain within itself the absolute purpose.” [§245].

Its purpose is the confirmation of abstraction.

“Nature has shown itself to be the idea in the *form of other-being*. Since the *idea* is in this form the negative of itself or *external to itself*, nature is not just relatively external *vis-à-vis* this idea, but *externality* constitutes the form in which it exists as nature.” [§ 247].

Externality here is not to be understood as the *world of sense* which *manifests itself* and is accessible to the light, to the man endowed with senses. It is to be

taken here in the sense of alienation, of a mistake, a defect, which ought not to be. For what is true is still the idea. Nature is only the *form* of the idea's *sother-being*. And since abstract thought is the *essence*, that which is external to it is by its essence something merely *external*. The abstract thinker recognises at the same time that *sensuousness – externality* in contrast to thought shuttling back and forth *within itself* – is the essence of nature. But he expresses this contrast in such a way as to make this *externality of nature*, its *contrast* to thought, its *defect*, so that inasmuch as it is distinguished from abstraction, nature is something defective.

| |XXXIV| An entity which is defective not merely for me or in my eyes but in itself – intrinsically – has something outside itself which it lacks. That is, its essence is different from it itself. Nature has therefore to supersede itself for the abstract thinker, for it is already posited by him as a potentially *superseded* being.

“For us, mind has *nature* for its *premise*, being nature's *truth* and for that reason its *absolute prius*. In this truth nature *has vanished*, and mind has resulted as the idea arrived at being-for-itself, the *object* of which, as well as the *subject*, is the *concept*. This identity is *absolute negativity*, for whereas in nature the concept has its perfect external objectivity, this its alienation has been superseded, and in this alienation the concept has become identical with itself. But it is this identity therefore, only in being a return out of nature.” [§ 381].

“As the *abstract* idea, *revelation* is unmediated transition to, the *coming-to-be* of, nature; as the revelation of the mind, which is free, it is the *positing* of nature as the *mind's* world – a positing which, being reflection, is at the same time, a *presupposing* of the world as independently existing nature. Revelation in conception is the creation of nature as the mind's being, in which the mind procures the *affirmation* and the *truth* of its freedom.” “*The absolute is mind*. This is the highest definition of the absolute.” [§ 384.] |XXXIV|

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Course: Hegel

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